INTERCULTURALISM, ECUMENICALITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

THE ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Through our article, we have briefly identified the concept of human dignity, both in the philosophical beginnings of humanity and as an ontological foundation of the person in Christianity. We have attempted to create a framework for dignity in conjunction with the concept of intercultural societies. In a Greek area where Christians and Muslims have lived together for over a century, we presented an educational example. While Philosophy sees the Law of Nature as a means of justification, and the United Nations apply the concept of human dignity, Orthodox Christianity considers each person to be an image of God and "brother and sister" in Jesus Christ.

Keywords: Orthodox Christianity, Ecumenicality, Interculturalism, Dignity, Education.

Human dignity as a philosophy concept

Human dignity (worth) is the foundation on which every human activity is built within the framework of the concept of human civilization because every action within every culture (must) be based on loyalty, credibility, and worthiness. Human dignity should not be an idea or a movement in our times, and it must be a weighting factor of a civilized local and "ecumenical" society. Further documentation will be provided below regarding the term 'ecumenical society'. The language with which we are accustomed, such as human rights, freedom, respect, and justice, was the supreme glory of natural law. Here I mean the "natural law" as Enlightenment understood it i.e., as the origin of right reason (*rationale*).

The first conception of the idea of Natural Law dates to the ancient Greek philosophers and especially to the Sophists of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. Through constant discussions and searches, they wanted to approach the nature of the order that should govern the relations of the then city-states. That is when the distinction was made between nature as a concept of justice and law as a utilitarian concept. For Stoicism, which was founded in Athens around 300 B.C. from the Cypriot Zenon of Kition[7] (a city of Cyprus, now called Larnaka), the main issue of life was the "living" according to one's nature, and through his rationality, to push towards Virtue. The

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[7] Diogenes Laertios, Book Z' «Βίοι καὶ γνῶμαι τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ εὐδοκιμησάντων», 5, 5-6. Προσήεσαν δὴ λοιπὸν ἀκούοντες αὐτοῦ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο *Στωικοὶ* ἐκλήθησαν καὶ οἱ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ὁμοίως, πρότερον *Ζηνώνειοι* καλούμενοι, καθά φησι καὶ Ἐπίκουρος ἐν ἐπιστολαῖς. Καὶ πρότερόν γε Στωικοὶ ἐκαλοῦντο οἱ διατρίβοντες ἐν αὐτῇ ποιηταί, καθά φησιν Ἐρατοσθένης ἐν ὀγδόῃ Περὶ τῆς ἀρχαίας κωμῳδίας, οἳ καὶ τὸν λόγον ἐπὶ πλεῖον ηὔξησαν.

Stoicians admired Socrates so much that they wanted to be called Socratic. Almost all the philosophical currents that followed were based on Socratic thought; the main ones were Plato's Academy, Aristotle Lyceum, and Stoicism (Guthrie, 1971). Adamantios Korais (1990) asserted that the teaching of the Stoics was the same as that of Socrates.

The Logos (*Λόγος*), the dominant concept in these philosophical currents, constitutes an alternative description of Good and the Divine element in man, shared with the gods and men as well as the law of Nature. Philo of Alexandria divided the term into *logos ad verbis*, that of communication, and *logos* (ενδιάθετος) as the internal world of thoughts, and each one was impossible without the other[8]. For the Stoics, the *Λόγος* is a regulatory principle of language, thought, and reality. Even Aristotle almost equated reasoning with wisdom (Dragona-Monachou, 1971). Stoic ethics aims to lead to a life in which people live in *harmony* with themselves, with those around them, with nature and with God.

The primitive spirituality of the Stoics proclaims man as a friend of God and follows Him willingly. Blaise Pascal, a French philosopher, and mathematician understood this difference much more clearly than several modern interpreters. The Stoic sage lacks understanding of the value of humility (Edelstein, 2002). Due to the predominance of Christianity as the official Church, the Christian West and St. Augustine of Hippo was significant during the 4th, early 5th century AD, who argued that before his "fall" the man lived free according to the rules of "natural law" but later became a slave of his passions.

Orthodox Patristic thought, and especially Saint John Chrysostom, held a middle position: after the Original Sin, human nature (and its reason) neither remained the same, nor was it completely corrupt. Since, according to Christian Theology (Origen), the first man was created in the image of the Divine Word, the authentic nature of the word of man is that of Jesus Christ. Only in this sense can we accept that the principles of Natural Law explain the salvation of Man and the World through the two natures (Divine and human) of Christ.

In contrast, Reformation Theology interprets Natural Law as a concept of Aristotelian Philosophy on the one hand and as a Roman Catholic characteristic on the other. However, both are considered outdated today after the moral positions expressed by Martin Luther and Immanuel Kant, each in their time and environment.

Modern societies are seen as plural and multicultural. For many philosophers, the multicultural character of such communities disproportionally limits the scope of the political principles that govern these societies. Relativists tend to emphasize the individual nature of human rights doctrine (Economides, 2009).

Ecumenicality: A concept from the Eastern Roman Empire up to the modern U.N.

We talked about an 'ecumenical society'. I avoid the term "Ecumenism", because having the well-known "*-ism*" as a suffix, it fragments the whole, notionally referring to a single system, which seeks to include the whole within itself (Totalitarianism). So, I will use the term "ecumenicality" or "ecumenicity" as an open, free, and democratic state, referring to the noun "ecumene" in its ancient Greek and Roman geographical meaning (see universality). Ecumenicality or universality can either connote interculturalism —which is based on the coexistence, communication, solidarity,

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[8] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: *https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/philo/*

and mutual enrichment of different cultures— or describe the idea of the dominance of a strong culture upon another as a matter of course.

A multicultural society is not the same as an intercultural one because the first term is the given one while the second term is the desired one (Delikonstantis, 1995). Interculturalism is not limited to a multicultural society. The coexistence of many different cultures that are not based on a specific framework of "civilized ideals" cannot lead to smooth coexistence and does not guarantee the protection of cultural minorities.

In the Eastern Roman Empire, there was a society that was universal or ecumenical for more than a thousand years. The Byzantine ideology was made up of the fundamental elements of Roman law, the Roman state organization, Christian ethics and belief, and the spiritual tradition of Hellenism (Karagiannopoulos, 1992). The Hellenistic culture (language, customs, etc.) was inherited by the Eastern Roman Empire but it had come to terms with the idea that the empire felt Roman, politically. The universality we mentioned earlier cannot be a blank slate, but it can create common ideals in human societies. The lack of cross-cultural respect for universal values sooner or later leads to disintegration and dilapidation.

These ideas are regulated by UNESCO through the U.N., but this is crucial because of the dominance of certain Western states (Puchala, 2005, pp.) 572-573) in the Organization that differs from its 'universal' dimension. It's common for there to be diverse speeds in different parts of the globe. The demands of the Third World and the right to development have been the focus of discussions for decades. Differing policies impose or often serve the universal value of human dignity and the rights from time to time.

The significance of religion in the refugee crisis

The importance of religion in the homemaking of refugees, who are called refugees under the *U.N. Act*, has been increasing over the past decades. The estimated number of people who have fled war conflicts, humanitarian crises, or natural disasters because of the circumstances and cannot return to their homes and countries is estimated to be millions. These immigrants and refugees, in many cases, depend not only on NGOs, but also on religious organizations and missionary networks. Religion is believed to provide shelter for those who are vulnerable or hurt, but the least that religion can offer humanity is social and humanitarian aid. Above all, it serves as a source of hope and faith. However, it is known that religious differences can often be a source of prejudice and violence, even if you don't realize it.

The U.N. has established global reports[9] through the years to integrate a pipeline of strategies about the cooperation of governmental and non-governmental actors regarding the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world, the Cultural interpretation and safeguarding, etc. Community relations can be strengthened through the implementation of best practices throughout the history of nations that were or are cross-cultural.

By respecting and accepting differences in language, culture, and religion, barriers of language, religion, culture, and ethics can be overcome. Self-criticism combined with the education that each country must provide to the youth and the intercultural dialogue both through institutions and at the individual level should lead to in-

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[9] Such as: *https://en.unesco.org/creativity/global-report-2018*

tercultural societies without the hostile or antagonistic prejudice of newcomers against societies and vi's a vi's on newcomers.

Society and its citizens must focus on this very society and its betterment (Zannis, 2013), not on politics, political representatives, or ideologies. Starting from the society and focusing on oneself is a good way to begin any practice. The informal sector is gradually expanding from the family to the top, and the state sector (government) will implement these practices accordingly. Nevertheless, UNESCO contributes to peace building, poverty eradication, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, science, culture, communication, and information. Interactions among people from different diverse groups are essential in the Intercultural Policy Paradigm's core idea. The multicultural policy paradigm has mainly focused on ensuring the cultural practices of different groups in terms of rights and equal opportunities. The strategy that focuses on promoting interaction, community-building, and reducing prejudice is currently recognized by international institutions, particularly European ones (Zapata-Barrero, 2017).

The right to education: a case study from Thrace, Greece.

Having mentioned the importance of global Organizations in our modern society, politics, and safety, we need to underline that their fundamental values in safeguarding all human's fundamental rights and needs —utopia or not— must be second to none. Education is a fundamental right for every person because it plays a crucial role in every society. The use of multiple cultural tools and social impact is utilized to establish connections between schools, culture, politics, and religion (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2011, pp. 75-89).

Due to the ever-increasing creation of multinational societies, the country's interconnected systems that accept refugees or economic migrants are undergoing corresponding changes and developments. To facilitate the integration of adults and younger people into the national education process, it is a long-term process. Numerous educational projects are under way internationally to examine the advantages and disadvantages of these changes. Each country adjusts to each such system based on its national policy as much as possible.

Through international collaborations, interdisciplinary dialogues, and research, dynamic educational mutations are promoted with the aim of improving societies. One of these projects, which takes place in Greece, is the "Project on the Education of Muslim Minority Children," where a team of youth workers has been working together for thirteen years now with children, adolescents, young adults, members of the Muslim minority, and the Christian majority society in Thrace, Greece.

A crucial Greek project was undertaken to promote theatre programs in education (TiE), school programs, which promote meaningful communication and understanding between people of different socio-cultural backgrounds (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2011, pp. 75-89). Specific difficulties were raised locally in Thrace during the last project, where the trainers faced reservations about their individual personality issues of diversity. This may also prove more than relevant in designing education programs for adults since it is evident that cultural and religious entanglements can either prevent or delay the smooth adaptation to new social data (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2011, pp. 75-89).

Moral or other dilemmas of newcomers to new social structures should be recognized to the extent that they do not negatively affect Aboriginal peoples. The approach is more effective when it concentrates on family rather than individuals. Edu-

cation needs to look at the forest, not just the tree, under those circumstances. The difficulties are visible, but they are not impossible if refugees or immigrants have good faith and positive feelings towards the social structure they are trying to join.

The role of Muslim communities: Greek Muslims in Thrace.

It is crucial to understand that the presence and essence of religion are not undermining any of the basic assumptions lying at the heart of the global order of our days. It is important to view the modern world as a positive challenge. Cultural understanding will be strengthened through the acceptance of each independent entity. For almost a century, there has been a well-organized Muslim minority in Greece due to bilateral pacts between Greece and Turkey and international treaties. The Minor Asia campaign resulted in the exchange of population between the two neighboring countries. Most issues that we can identify among the mixed population of Greek Christians and Greek Muslims – mostly Pomaks and Turkish speaking - are about gender equality, protection of children's rights, marriage issues due to the subordinate position of women in relation to the husband, Islamic inheritance law, etc. The Hellenic Republic maintained the establishment of a peaceful and fruitful symbiosis between communities of people with different religions regarding human rights. In Greece, Muslim communities are found in Athens (about 80,000) and the Dodecanese (about 3,000-4,000). There have been no serious or radical incidents in this intercultural and interreligious society up to this point. The problem of the Hellenic State not organizing mosques in Athens cannot be resolved by the function of a single Sunni Mosque. The diverse Muslim populations prevent Sunni and Shia Muslims from praying in the same area.

Islam is being called upon to rediscover its doctrine of freedom and peace for Muslims and all of humanity as the Middle East is once again emerging on the world stage. Islam only abolished what was contrary to the spirit of the new religion and assimilated what was consistent with it in general concepts and legal issues. This ability to assimilate historical, geographical, political, and cultural data is one of the most characteristic features of Islam and, at the same time, a great legacy in the subsequent development of the Muslim community into a world power (Marioras, 2014).

The worrying acknowledgment of many Muslim believers who turn to radical movements and towards the "external jihad" is because they feel that their religious beliefs are declining due to the broader acceptance of Western Civilization. Islam's radicalization has been observed throughout its history, and politics and extreme nationalism seem to be the main reasons behind it. In the modern jihad movement, Sayyid Qutb is the most influential radical theorist. Since Muslims are unable to access the country's political scene, and have been subjected to severe persecution since 1954, the only way out is through violence. Qutb uses the term *takfir* – which means aphorism – for governments, even if they present themselves as Islamic when the principles underpinning their policy are not entirely Islamic (Chouseiri, 1997). Despite, the radicalization of the religion of Islam from various political or social actors, Oriental culture and religion are not altered and converge on a world peace that respects the rights of all people. Regardless of its origins, Western or Eastern, fanaticism has not contributed to any progress of humanity.

Christian Orthodox Anthropology and Human Dignity in Ecumenical Context

The Orthodox Christian view of man is understood in relation to the New Testament, St. Athanasios bishop of Alexandria, and the Cappadocian Fathers. The likeness of God depends on the human- will because it exists in him or her as a possibility but is acquired when it is activated by him or herself voluntarily.

The freedom of will determines our choices, our actions, our errors, and our future. The ability to use logic and intellect is what distinguishes humans from non-logic individuals. The human soul, which was built ex nihilo by God's creative breath into man, makes him/her participate in both the visible (sensible/material) and the invisible (spiritual) reality. But this spiritual element of man is what pushes him to self-transcendence. The power of this eschatological destination motivates man to strive for the best and the highest every moment of his/her life. However, our disadvantage is that this high destination of ours (*deification*) has today been replaced by the frenzy of glory, money, and the easy life. Human selfishness is the root of evil, which led Adam and Eve to cut off their communication with the life-giving God and be deprived of the archaic paradisiacal state. Having a personal conscience and life is essential to respect others' rights. In Orthodoxy, the use of will (volition) and logic requires self-knowledge (autognosis) and purification.

Also, like all people come from Adam and Eve, regardless of race, color, origin, social status, wealth, etc. their divine origin is the reason for their dignity (Giannoulatos, 2000). Furthermore, Christ became a human being and was crucified for all mankind. Indeed, the divine Incarnation "in Christ" has attached special importance to the value of man. Each man consisting of body and soul created in between the natural and spiritual worlds as the crown of creation (Androutsos, 1956). This means that all people, without exception, are children of God (though not all heirs of His Kingdom, according to St. Chrysostom) and, therefore, brothers and sisters to each other. Eating and drinking the unique blood of Christ God-man strengthens this sacramental cohesion. This means, again, that all humanity, with its diversity (see three hypostases of the Holy Trinity), is an uninterrupted oneness and entity as a common God (Father). The common destiny that all people have in life, which is the path to attaining God's image and likeness, is intertwined with the existence of unity in diversity (Unitas Multiplex).

In Orthodox theology, the ideal anthropological archetype is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son and God's Word. The effort to recover this initial unity with God, which states through the work of the incarnate Word and Son of God, Jesus Christ, relates to salvation itself. In a different way, it is the process of reconciling human beings with God. This reunification (see *Hierogamy*) is, after all, an essential condition for human renewal.

St. Gregory Palamas specifies that the word "Man" is not applied to either soul or body separately but to together since both have been created in the image of God (Lossky, 1957). Respecting a man's personal identity is a crucial ideal of our era (Zizioulas, 1977). At the same time, while there is a global dialogue regarding the concept of *personality* today, the recognition that the concept of the *person* is closely related to Christian Theology is not properly recognized.

The person seeking freedom is a unique and specific entity that is directly connected to this human existence (Zizioulas, 1977). The unique character here is perceived by others in society. The Holy Trinity's essence is one, simple and common,

but it never lacks substance and a "way of being." Because the Father as the cause of the existence of the other two divine hypostases gives birth to the Son eternally and emanates the Holy Ghost eternally.

Conclusions

To summarize, we can clearly say that it is necessary that every human being should be occupied with "healthy" concerns about the issues of his or her nature and how these can -to a greater or lesser extent- affect them - either do this by themselves, as members of an organization, or through Social Movements. The question is how effective the implementation and the methods that the global Institutions use are and if they can secure the fundamental rights of vast numbers of people moving from the East to the West and from the South to the North.

The process can be made easier by any nation that adheres to the human rights initiative. Human life's safety should always be the top priority, regardless of cultural or religious barriers, and that applies equally. The ontological significance of this is that everyone must spiritually evaluate how our capacities and power over the natural world have been achieved.

The global crises of mankind have always led to the ultimate awakening of the human spirit, but not all have achieved their moral and spiritual upliftment. Let us unite in the thought that the transient state of the world created to the paternal interpretation of the concept of "member of the body of Christ". Orthodoxy defends the right (Kokosalakis, 2002) of every human being, when it is based on the pursuit of unity, the acceptance of the differentiation of the other, and the condemnation of individualism and hostilities, because this leads the person to fulfill the purpose of the union with its Creator.

Christianity, especially Orthodoxy, should remember its Ecumenical mission (Karakolis, 2011, p. 144). The Only Judge and Examiner of hearts can determine the extent to which Heterodoxes, and non-Christians can be members of God's Kingdom.

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